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Sonnets



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Fireside Sonnets

BY

JOHN R. STRONG

||

Ἦδη γὰρ φάος οἴχεθ' ὑπὸ ζόφον, οὐδὲ ἔοικε
Δηθὰ θεῶν ἐν δαιτὶ θάασσέμεν, ἀλλὰ νέεσθαι.

Odyssey III, 335.

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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK LONDON
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1916

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To
THE MEMORY
OF
L. C. S.

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SONNETS

THE FIRESIDE

I

FIRELIGHT

The firelight: it is more sweet than sad
To gaze into its depths of crystal flame,
Its change to time from each bright shape it had,
Its comforting to feel remain the same.
What joy was in the tree of yesterday,
Or it which centuries has lain in coal,
To raise among the woods his tree-top gay
From place in vale, or on ambitious knoll!
And now it crumbles slowly in its course,
In tranquil loss of flake, and dust, and all;
So our strange shape and functions lose their force,
With whate'er fire the mind its own can call.
But whatsoe'er it be that may befall,
I know a single movement governs all.

II

TREE'S TRIAL

But O, the toils and visions of lament
That that embossèd bulk bore in the blast!
What howling winds withheld, in darkness blent,
What strains, what tremors, facing each shock
cast!

And, too, the longing for fair days of peace,
And light, and joy, in vales of rest eterne,
And all the dumb, dim hopes of branched increase,
Which hopes and longing in one fire do burn!
What argument is this for thinking Care,
Where character resides, when every floss
And silken tendril Nature shewed to dare
Is buried deep, or suffers fiery loss?

O, happy was thy head, in days of youth,
In what thou hadst, though it be naught, in
sooth!

III

TREE'S RELIGION

(γνώθι σεαυτόν)

The tree that glassed itself into the pool,
Its delicate, feathery arms saw in the bowl,
If such it had; not human was its school,
Though in its attitude it might teach a soul.
Intruded in the depths of mirrored world
It saw its image, baseless as a dream.
Perhaps it knew itself; its wealth unfurled
Seemed like a labour in the peaceful stream,
And, too, a likeness pure. Here, it is strange,
Two such ideas co-mix; here, too, it wist
That counterpart serene that, without change
Or toil, suggests a better world we list.

If such insight had trees, so long ago,
Think that a reflex lies in all we know.

IV

FIREPLACE

The fire burns up brightly as I think,
And Elsie comes in now and sits with me,
My wife of many years, now on the brink
Of vales descending; seld do we agree.
“Your ideas are poetic, Mr. Strong,
But mine are plainer prose.” Then’d archly say:
“Who, like your tree, could ever gaze so long?”
“It’s satisfied to do so, all it may,”
Half dryly I reply, not more; I fear
The light of that clear eye. “Let me alone,
To write as judgment flickers.” Then appear
Young thoughts, young hopes, the fireside circle
grown.
And half-reluctant, I bring in the wood
That once has known so much of bad and
good.

THE COLISEUM

The Coliseum! As the starry night
Above looks down with looks strange and severe,
The moon invading with low, cloud-barred light,
I glide about in eyelet arch and pier.
How many, O how many crowded throngs
Have been where now is moonbeams' fancy's
home!

What glorious men, what talk of rights and wrongs,
The pomp of Emperors, and the pride of Rome!
Within thy frame the shadowy mourners go,
The shapes that lie within thee through the day;
Within thy urn a voice cries out to know
If century-weighted age aught can allay.
Here yet remaineth still thy archèd wall,
Though but for ruin or for sudden fall.

IN MEMORIAM

H. R.

(Ob. May, 1882)

As Phaeton pressed toward the Sun, to take
His sky-ascending steeds, that, blessing us,
Bring forth the glorious light, where dawn doth
break,

To chase away night black and troublous,
And overcome, from him completion fled,
And noble trust walked broken-hearted, sad,
And in the lightless Earth faith was as dead,
And great attempt in beauty's quest as mad,
Lake Spofford's rippling, sunlit waves destroyed
Hermann, the brightest genius of our time,
Hermann, as Nature taught what we enjoyed,
Where waves break beachward with melodious
chime.

O Death, thy reign of night unsparing takes;
Thy hated rule our end like darkness makes.

THE SAME

As Phaeton pressed toward the Sun, to take
His sky-ascending steeds, that, blessing us,
Lift up the glorious light, where dawn doth break,
To chase away night black and troublous,
So, now, the fairest promise of our time
Lies drowned, Hermann hushed, his concourse,
tollèd,

Tell that his strength was that which every clime
Gives to the company of heroes old.

He was a youth on whom the bended eyes
Of all his City dwelt, each thought him first;
The sweetest-dispositioned boy, but wise,
Composer, and Musician, in much versed.

To tell his worth were like a fable—No,
His flower died in bud, let this be so.

MEADOW-ELEGY

(Paraphrase of Beethoven's Op. 59, No. 3, *Andante con moto quasi Allegretto*)

Here, where waving grass, with tufted head,
Nods to the Sun, I mourn the dead Mozart.
In such a place I turn the noisy mart
Into a memory, and sigh the dead
With every wave of wind, whose passing tread
Presses the chosen stalks,—and so depart,
Each in his turn, the leaders of our Art,
Who seem for nothing to have worked and bled.
Yet, for a time, I'll sit and sing that bloom,
That sang to gracious shapes this rough world's
 core,
One ever missed, now laid in nameless tomb.
Ah bitter, wringing pain, that Time walks o'er
The heads of such as he, my model, whom
No more my eyes shall see, no more, no more!

IMPROMPTU

Yield none assent, ye lovely maids, that worth
Is cheapened, or hath less than first in price;
The storms which cloud the melancholy Earth
Are not Love's Sun, which seeth Paradise.
For where, in glistering Heaven, o'er travail,
Sweet Juno giveth share of weal and woe,
The Hours that do fly on brightest sail
Are those that bearing truth to lovers go.
So trust ye not to them that steal away
And bring deceit to those that love do ask;
Let such with idler trifles their time play
And never think for Love's best, highest, task.
For so it is with us that thus would be,
We take the place of Love, still ne'er Love see.

THE LUMBER-WOODS

Among our musical 'tops' the breezes lie down,
About our golden arms they hourly play;
Who liveth to our beauty owns our sky-crown,
His mind looks to that grandeur every day.
Like venom-gilded snake the woodman glideth,
For littlest gold 'gainst forest kings there sent,
And with his steel his will he so provideth
That, as he grows, is Nature's beauty spent.
Oft jocund is his camp, and strong his hand,
Yet as a fell disease his progress marreth;
Albeit his habitations grace the land,
Yet harmfully his hand the greenwood scarreth.
 Away, thou careless harvester! Thy gangs
 Are worse, in forest right, than serpent's fangs.

A SONATA

I

ALLEGRO

As, in the morning's light, the trees' first choirs
Wake at the Sun's approach; his radiant face,
Looking among the boughs, finds no deniers,
And breezes move each tuneful resting place;
Then do his coursers turn toward the sky,
While, as they stamp the Heavenly way, all folks
Look upward, each with bright, inquiring eye,
To see his face, and, 'midst the pines and oaks,
The winds, his messengers, such sure tidings bring
Of yearned delights that their dull wood doth sing;
So thou, my love, on my youth's dawn arising,
Didst gaze on me; since then, in stubborn pining,
I long to see thy face, which thou dost hide,
For 't is but night to be by thee denied.

II

ANDANTE

As, in the light of pale Cytherea's Moon,
The wayfarer toils upon the lonely steep,
And thinketh oft of what was ne'er his own,
And turneth heavily where he would weep,
So, in the light of mine own soul, within,
I sigh the days when I have loved in vain,
And o'er the path that leadeth this to win
I toil with steps that lief would toil again.
And when the Moon from her high place hath
 flown,
And night pervadeth all, serene and still,
He husheth yet his ever-rising moan,
So from the starry spheres my need I fill.
 For they are they who smile, who comfort,
 move,
As if they had some thought for us above.

III

MINUETTO

So is it not, thou perfect maid, thy worth
To be compared with aught of land or sea,
For they of choice-impressèd, half-fair Earth,
Unequal, bend in perfect truth to thee.
The shining light of Heaven, raging clouds
Do check in action; even gentle air,
A devastating whirlwind, meadows shrouds,
Whose labour falls, a moment earlier fair.
But thou, a form of Nature and of Mind,
Choolest that thou for mastering Time must be,
So thy perfection, to th' imperfect kind,
Shows like a diamond for the world to see.

Lo! he, who would this diamond bear away,
Let him o'er rivals be, else single stay.

IV

FINALE

Now, as late-blushing day the tree-top spires
Gilds with departing gold; the spreading leaves
Stand all mute doubters, and the chanting choirs
Now mute, save one that carols as he grieves;
As, on a setting path, the rolling Sun
Hath journeyed, golden, dusty, to his end,
Whom now the forest seeth where he's done—
Then sunset comes, and night, and stars amend;
They look like life above where night doth dwell,
Where they are all whom we have loved so well;
So do thy words yet in my memory cling;
Thy acts—though naught but pain do such words
 bring;
So thy fair look yet cometh—as a dream,
As once the Moon did to Endymion seem.

SPRING

Lo, now the oxen come in furrowed fields,
The blackbird sings, and calls his perching mate,
The winds are still, where any hillock shields,
And Spring hath now her gifts to arbitrate.
The mountains put off Winter; they're for Man;
And forward as his allies; on their sides
Th' esquiring zephyrs hasten with their plan
Of vaulting heraldry and green Summer's prides.
"Thus hath it ever been," the farmer says,
And whistles to his team right joyfully;
The forests echo thousand thousand ways,
While babbling streamlets chatter what's to be.
None are like thee, O Spring! th' abundant lays
Of birds innumerable do adorn thy days.

METEMPSYCHOSIS

Sing, verses wild, unto the Conqueror, Man!
He, with bare feet, the hard Earth pressèd so
That he stood upright; delicate, too, began,
That he above the unreasoning herd might show.
Great citadels, and Learning's domes that soar
O'er Earth, he reared, yet threw them all behind,
Impatient so, and, bare as e'er before,
Entered the realm of the individual mind.
Will he not conquer too? O, beckoning lights,
That in that darkness live as that could be,
Can ever be made his your lessoning nights,
Or ever come but dreams to Man from ye?
Here, on the plains where did wild horses range,
His cities dwell, awaiting some such change.

APRIL IN THE CATSKILLS

Haste, glorious Spring! of Heaven the earliest
born,
For in such time did first the plants put forth
Their green embracements. Then, on ragged
Earth,
Sprang up the tree-trunks; now, in footsteps
worn,
Thou comest in thy sweet-laced majesty
To take thy kingdom. Thus my fortunes, too,
Revive as I could ask, nor should I rue
That this remakes what else bleak poverty
Near made a ruin. Thus do ever joys
Repair themselves by new; through bluest skies
Winter's gray pallor rages; this annoys,
But turns to brighter days, to Man's surprise.
Come forth into the fields! The girls and boys
Dance there around; come, follow him who tries.

BACON'S SONNETS

(The Merry Wives of Windsor, Act IV, Sc. 1)

“*Hang-hog is Latin for Bacon,*”—Good Dame,
Thou layedst an opinion 'fore the Court;
Seems Shakspeare's; like for Essex that retort,
For once drawn out to judge a living name.
As if to rival Punch's blows swift sped,
Baconians have a stage; Lincoln, aye,
Giotto, Beethoven, whoe'er you'd say,
All can come up, though humble, save Will's head.
The Books shout “No!” Bacon? *How could he*
call

His Sonnets, written to his nearest friends,
Shakspeare's? And, then, the Master's lines have
all

The wealth Lord Bacon in his Psalms intends.
Of all the follies that invade the brain,
This has the least to justify its reign.

THE APOLLO BELVEDERE

(Impromptu, to a photograph)

Apollo Belvedere, thy beauty makes
A slave of unbound night, that twilight's gold
Doth scatter. Paused, but after judgment, bold,
Now free, thy arrow sped, thy anger breaks
In smiles more sweet than dawn when night is fled.
Dim mystery of darkness! God of light,
Canst thou not stop defeat? Thy glance so bright
Marks not the snake uprear his envious head.
A serpent close as close men's faults all be,
Oft-storied sculptures tell and verses sing,
Yet, as thy shadows darkness bring to me,
I marvel not the ages naught such bring.
Thy risen sister's light now comes to thee;
Thou standest in thy beauty answering.

THE MATTERHORN

The Matterhorn! It has not seen its like
In all the Alps, since first the Alps were known.
It has within itself the things which strike
The imagination, for it is alone.

When first I saw its shape I stooped my knee,
And said, "Such is the form that heroes make;
There is no other in the world like thee,
Thou glorious shape, to so the world forsake!"
But when the moonlight falls on thee apace,
And in thy heights a shadowy thought thou art,
The eye that seeth thee in wondrous place
Doth think that stone may have a spirit's part.

There is no mountain shape, the Alp-lands
know,
As thou there art, alone above the snow.

LIFE

I

THE UNHAPPY PARADISE

I stand alone, no God in sight,
The worm corrodes and nothing stands;
With rift, that sears in hope's despite,
And pitfalls, lie the sunlit lands.
Contention rules; the Ocean's sands
In grating murmur tell their fight;
Let all be done that may with hands,
At last force ends and rests in night.
Attracting vision, sense-web spun,
'Twixt Past and Future whirl its days,
Best for its purpose, worse than none.
Limbed like the deer, my speed betrays,
Yet, transformed safe, I'd ne'er have done
To thread its glades, to learn its ways.

II

TO MY SON

My boy, who nothing of your years have known,
In nonage yet, who through glassed streams will
fare,

And to the ragged hills bring steps that dare,
And thus elide the traces of my own,
Who will among the flowers set your throne,
And find beneath the rose its jagged snare,
O'er all the solid world the slow ploughshare,
And see where in the soil the harvest's sown,
Now that the night of age fore-gives his sign,
And I, amid the dusk, have all or none,
I would not take your length of years for mine.
Be guided, and when that last Westering sun
Shall leave the sky, its beautified decline
Shall seem to show the course that you have run.

III

TO G. T. S. III

(Written for my wife)

My boy, who nothing of your years have known,
Yet all in nonage, now the glorious face
Of Nature and her smile of endless grace
Open your notice; now in you are grown
Young budding muscles and soon will be shown
Your utmost strength; now for your feet the race
That gives the prize, for you the wrestler's place,
Odysseus' mind, Achilleus' hand to throne.
So, high in prudence stand, and take the mind
The first of all things, for, from out its hall,
Come acts as from a press, with worth assigned;
Then, on the field stand forth to catch the ball,
So of the City's prize, and ever find
To be among the first, your joy in all.

IV

AFTER

Ah, broken heart, repine not as thou wouldst,
Lest out of all thy mind thy nature fail;
Remember not the hours missed, the vale,
Wherein deep sorrows lie, of what thou shouldst.
For, as the clock tells minutes, and thou couldst
Have watched them as thy pulse, so never sail,
Nor row, nor woodland walk did thee avail,
And then the lightning struck thee as thou stood'st.
As Peter did his inward dawn destroy,
And then he went out and wept bitterly,
So I hope for forgiveness in some while.
There yet I trust, beholding her in joy,
Amid God's angels throned, so fair to see,
To ask for recognition and her smile.

THE GREAT ALTERNATIVE

The great alternative: Can Nature school
Her atoms to that cursed, birth-hating dust
Of Chaos-born Man, or not? Can she adjust
Man from Chaos' limit, tearful fool,
Created to her fundamental rule
Opposed, still more, we say, a thing august,
When rising to his height, and, as we trust,
Above both him and her, not her mere tool?
No simple earth made Man; not Sirius' height
E'er shone with brightness like his deeds. We know
There is no other thought; one has been right.
So Man repeats, with age-recurring woe,
The greatest of the human reason's flight:
"THAT is, without which Man would not be so."

QUESTION

And yet, what's in ourselves of utter rout
Of Fancy's shaping? Every mind of thought
Deems as a treasure all that Good has taught,
Distressèd by the coastless chart of doubt,
Convinced by neither, for the snaky knout
Hangs over fortune, and there lives not aught
But quarrels for subsistence; ill lives, wrought
Into the weft of life, no life without.

For this present, the mind on tosses, driven
Through hopes and fears, a sea at hopeless war,
A virtue seeming like a rescue stolen.

What is the future, when the law, our star,
Shines not to Eternity and Heaven,
Alike beyond our prospect, as we are.

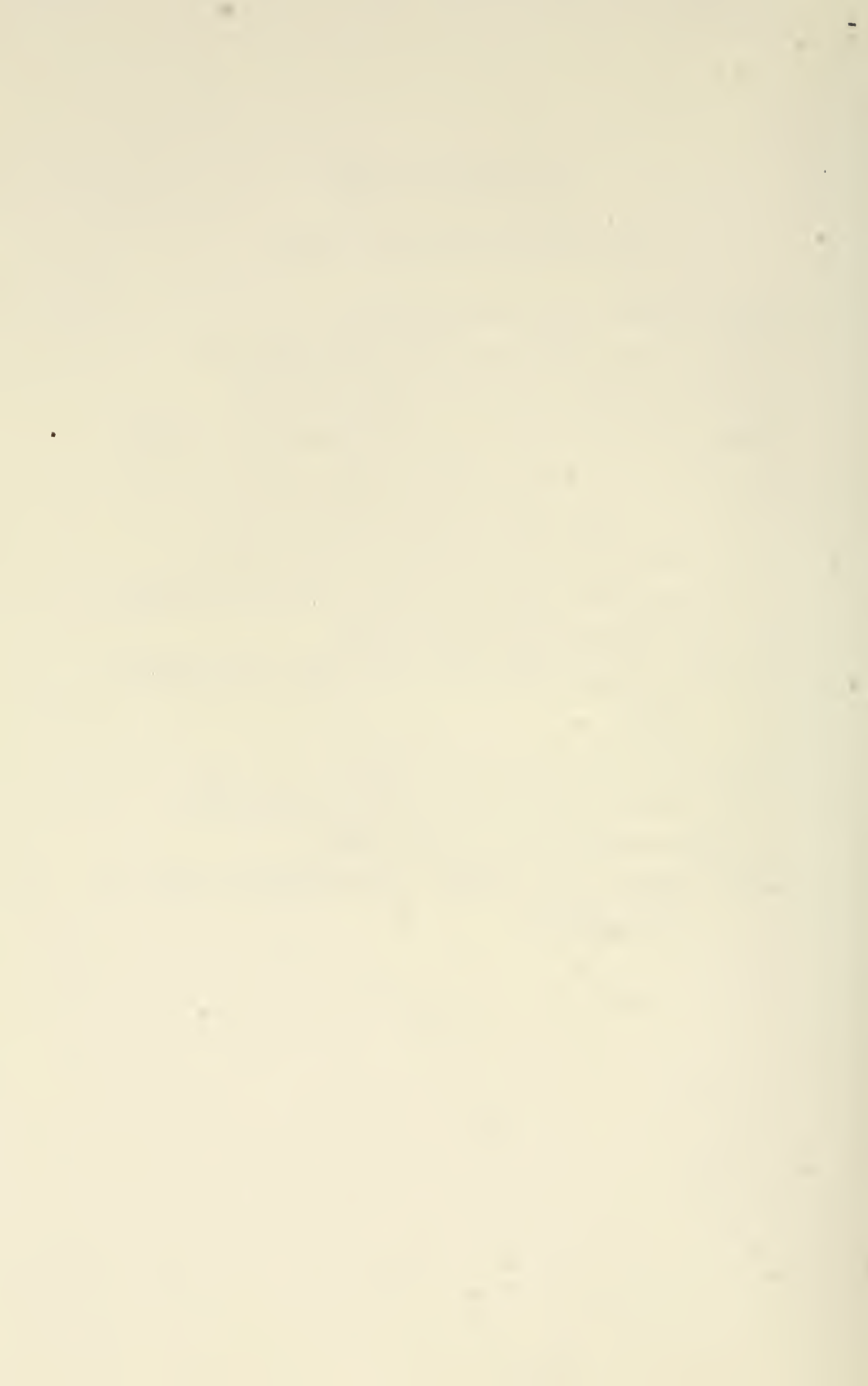
THE ROSE

Existence is delight unto the Rose,
That, save in dying, knows not aught of death;
But Man looks after, all his hours knows
Of millioned accident and flight of breath.
When, then, did Nature to this knowledge rise,
So force the clay? How does she leap the span
That bounds the perfect crystal of the wise,
Faith, Hope, and Charity, respect for Man
And Nature, awe reached, gentleness displayed,
Truth ever sought, its seeker made a seer?
The common grasses unrespected fade,
But to a flower Heaven should drop a tear
For killing aught so pretty, but we aid;
We are the mourners, paying this debt clear.

IL PENSIEROSO

La Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Firenze.

Seated alone, and ever to be so,
'Midst motes and atoms that each single fly,
I watch the day approach when I can die,
When, only through that, I'll make way to know.
The days roll 'round, their objects rise and grow,
The stars begin their courses, gild the sky,
Shed lustre here on what goes wandering by,
And none know whither, why, or whence they go.
In such eternal meditation might
Earth's worms outwatch the years, unanswered
still;
Eternity is no part of such sight.
The watcher sees the years their times fulfill,
A million pass as in a single night,
And knows not, thought o'er-matched, what he
should will.



RALLY

La Chiesa di San Lorenzo, Firenze. 1

No, there is more within this inch of Time;
A principle, a something, scarce seen, holds,
Controls the shipwrecks, met in every clime,
That sees us even as the mountain-folds.
The Sun arising, renovates the world;
Man's toil begins, as, darting from the hive,
The insect squares his quivering oars, pearled,
And merry larks sing where the plough-men strive.
Who can o'er-praise this gracious, temperate scene
Of shadowy Earth? So should it truly be
For us, its passengers; its mantle green
And white embraces more than any see.
No, there is more within this Earthly plan,
Contradictory of itself in Man.

FAREWELL

Farewell, farewell, forever go,
My playground, loved e'en deep in snow,
With sunny days, and Ocean proud,
And mountains tossed, and minds endowed,
And rough-hewed crowd, and Moon and stars,
And stony ground, and force that wars!
And thunder-storms, aye my delight,
With frowning sceptres, black as night,
And lightning, born of Heaven's own stain,
That seems to threaten hill and plain.
Through all a beauty like divine,
In grain of sand and tasseled pine,
But what it is, how beauty comes,
Tells not at all, and asking dumbs.
So, too, a whisper seems divine,
Like sea-shell's, from the Ocean's mine—
I, not alone self-conscious, go
To THAT whose adjunct is to know.

THE MOON-DWELLER

I

DAY TO NIGHT

At midnight on the Moon the dweller might
Have Earth at zenith, a vast, white-touched ball,
A sea like turquoise, continents green or white,
Incessantly revolving, light on all.
The Sun appears along the airless void
As darkness edges Earth, toward which Earth
turns;
The Sun arises, and the dark, deployed,
Creeps on its course till Night Earth's conquest
earns.
Darkness has Earth, yet girt about with light,
A wreath, of rainbow colours we may think,
The Sunflower of the Heavens, nameless sight,
That puzzles thought, leads knowledge past its
brink.
O Earth, thou art a scene too wild for me;
Inexorable home, awe is in thee!

II

NIGHT TO DAY

The Sun the zenith passes by, to show
His journey to the West; then there's a light;
Aurora rises on Earth's Sunward bow
And day there follows, slowly gaining height.
Full noon then follows, bright to him who sits
In instant darkness, when the Sun has set,
As o'er the magic brightness cloud-land flits
Like sails angelic in some triumph met.
Like hermits o'er the slowly moving globe,
Like wayfarers with candles through the night,
They move, serene in vastness, bright of robe,
The life in an inexplicable sight.

The sphere which, black, is as a land of dreams,
When light as much a singular jewel seems.

III

MECHANICS

The circle told makes one long lunar day,
In voiceless solitude, relieved, in part,
By wonders noted, as, the waving way
The Moon avoids eclipses on her chart;
The Earth's oblique poise, eccentric boon,
That makes the Sun go North and South, and so
Gives to the seasons difference, and the Moon
Runs high in Winter when the Sun is low;
The evening Harvest-Moon; and still simple,
Although in detail complex, laws allot
Each motion, and, no builder visible,
None can say how it could be or not.

Time is not for motions such as these,
In endless space inset in boundaries.

IV

LIFE

Upon the Earth, the noblest work of all
Appears in Man and Woman, clear-browed pair,
Benign their faces as beyond befall,
Reared from childish state in gardens fair.
Where paths through waving trees, with flowers
 bedight,
Are fair, as those best know who most can see,
There lived my love, beneath the concave light;
Life beyond price, in all a mystery!
Thus, then, the sphere seems not mere matter quite,
But almost spiritual harmony,
Transmuting nature into moral height,
Mother of minds, Instructress, boundary.
 The outcome is to come that none shall spare,
 All known as strangely led and full of care.

ENVOY

There is an island set deep in the Ocean,
Where Apollo in music perpetual dwells;
The bass is the roar of the Ocean,
The treble the wind in the leaves.

DISCONNECTED STANZAS

DISCONNECTED STANZAS

PART I

I

IN shady woodland scenery oft
The heart inquisitive loves to stray,
Measuring its steps to breezes soft,
With chequered thoughts along the way.

II

As vast in forest the wood extends,
How little seem my ends and aims!
I am one that for naught contends;
A look my fretful motion shames.

III

The falling leaf comes yellowing down,
Like Lucifer against the sky;
Mixed are the thoughts that it has shown,
Mixed as the leaves where it will lie.

IV

And yet, what is there in the wood
That does not murmur "yesterday,"
As if the spirit of the good
Remained of trees that would not stay?

V

Beneath the ponderous giant's bed
There lay one we can scarcely see;
His mossy length marks where, ere sped
A hundred years, he used to be.

VI

The mushroom's shade, what tiring place
For gentle Peaseblossom with his cap!
The little elf upturns his face—
A happy 'fall to whom such hap!

VII

Cobweb is here, I'm sure; he is
Of tarrying, King; all day he leans
Along a twig; his business 't is
With spiders' trade, whate'er he means.

VIII

And little Moth; he flies all day
As well as night; he seeks the shade
And hidden place, and knows to weigh
Of what must fall and what must fade.

IX

Last, Mustard-seed, the tiniest he
And mightiest of the fairies four;
He sets the seed of every tree
And plant upon the forest floor.

INTERLUDE

I

Humor is a saving grace;
Under melancholy boughs,
Let a man himself arouse,
And put on a better face!

II

None in kindness mistake;
Set Good Nature on the throne!
He that has it not be shown,
In a pool, his look of snake!

III

Out upon the wretched elf,
That was not conceived to joke!
Let him stop self-love, or choke;
In sweet Nature see himself!

IV

From her throne Good Nature rise,
Speak with grace to all the world!
“Learn my law! My flag unfurled
Should rule all, beneath all skies.”

PART II

I

By winding ways, past maples sheer
And snaky beeches, still I go;
Each turn I see the new appear
And leave what I have learned to know.

II

Ambition's face is dullèd here;
The forest of itself explains,
In crowded bole and sapling sere,
The hideousness of jostling gains.

III

What Nature made that bird and bough
So pretty? Each the other shakes
That each seems made for other; how
Is 't Nature such of nothing makes?

IV

The gnats above the Autumn stream
Hover in sunlight, nothing know
But that their law is thus; their dream
Is that law's stream must ever flow.

V

What thoughts of suns in splendor rolled,
Revolved in the abyss of Time,
To make the forest's recessed gold,
Arise as thoughts to causes climb!

VI

What dreams that fairies leave the moon,
Among the hanging boughs to glide,
With fairy taps that beat too soon,
And merry crews that homeward ride!

VII

The rest and beauty of the wood
That, far within its outmost guard,
Exist in stillness, with Man's good
Entwine, and are not safely marred.

VIII

O, he who would a proof survey
Of that which must be more than he,
In shadowy pool his image stay,
Then let him say whence can it be.

IX

The character that Man does have
Comes from above; from what above
Less then a character, that gave
The power to know, the strength to love?

FINIS

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